Disciplinary knowledge denied?

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Richard Harris

Introduction

Many chapters in this book are premised on the merits of young people being introduced to history as a form of disciplinary knowledge. This chapter, however, takes a different perspective and looks first at the extent to which young people have access to history education and second at whether this education actually reflects a disciplinary approach to the subject. To do this, the chapter draws on two different studies. One set of data, from a longitudinal series of large-scale surveys (conducted on behalf of the Historical Association (HA) in the UK), focuses on the decisions that schools and the history departments within them make about how to construct and deliver their curriculum.[1] The other set of data, which consists of schemes of work and interviews with 10 heads of history departments in the south of England, looks more closely at the type of historical knowledge students actually encounter in the curriculum in the first two or three years of their secondary schooling.[2]

Schools and curriculum pressures

Structural issues within the education system (particularly issues relating to performativity and methods of arms-length governance) have a major influence on what schools do, as do the challenges presented by social inequalities, financial resourcing and curriculum structures (see, for example, Young, 2018). These all have the potential to help or hinder access to a history education. Although Young (2014: 8) argued that

examining the curriculum and the type of knowledge that is appropriate is 'the pre-eminent issue for all of us in education', such deliberation can easily get sidelined as other considerations and pressures appear to attract more attention from many policymakers, senior school leaders and teachers.

In a period of performativity, when a school's outcomes are subject to extensive external scrutiny, it is not surprising that many schools appear to be caught between meeting the accountability standards by which they are judged and enacting their educational ideals; or that some should tend to prioritise narrow, measurable academic outcomes rather than the overall educational experience of young people (Braun *et al.*, 2010; Solomon and Lewin, 2016). Nowadays, the pervasive nature of accountability measures can present a conundrum for many schools as they balance what is best for the reputation of the school as judged by academic outcomes (Adams, 2017) and what might be considered best for individual students. These tensions play out at a practical level in many English secondary schools, as a variety of curricular decisions have to be made: about how much curriculum time to give to different subjects; about who teaches these subjects and to which year groups; whether students get two or three years of teaching devoted to examination courses (with a direct impact on how much time is given to earlier stages of secondary education); and whether all students have access to a subject beyond the lower years of secondary schooling. All of these considerations can directly and indirectly affect the access a student has to an historical education, yet comparatively little is known about how schools 'do' curriculum, especially at the subject level; what decisions are taken; and what impact the wider policy context has on the extent and nature of students' experience of different subjects. The first set of data is used to explore the decisions schools make.

History teachers and the curriculum

Once schools have decided what degree of access young people have to a history education, the next issue is what sort of approach is taken to that education. Here we can usefully draw on the notion of three 'futures' (Young and Muller, 2010) to distinguish different approaches. An emphasis on 'Future 1' would see a strong focus on acquiring substantive knowledge about the past, where such knowledge is seen as being largely uncontested and unproblematic. 'Future 2' would see an emphasis on 'generic' skills and forms of thinking. A 'Future 3' model

would adopt a more explicit disciplinary approach, looking beyond the presentation of substantive knowledge to consider *both* the 'second-order' concepts that serve to structure the way in which the subject is understood (concepts such as causation or change and continuity), *and* the processes by which claims to knowledge are made (for example, Lee, 2011). The latter emphasis on how claims are made in history, and their tentative and evolving nature, is often seen as the most obvious manifestation of history as 'powerful knowledge'. Young and Muller (2010: 21) argued, for example, that disciplines must 'possess legitimate, shared and stably reliable means for generating truth' for knowledge to be 'powerful'. More recently, Muller and Young (2019) have also acknowledged that engagement with second-order concepts, such as change and continuity, also aligns with notions of powerful knowledge. The ability to make connections across time to explain events and to compare and contrast developments, allows people to develop new insights, and it is 'the quality of the argumentation and "judgment-making" [that] characterises what History is all about' (Muller and Young, 2019: 207).

As a result of the way in which the history curriculum has developed over the past 50 years in England, it is often assumed that a disciplinary approach is widespread. In particular, the Schools Council History Project, developed in the 1970s (and later known as the Schools History Project or SHP), advocated both an emphasis on students' understanding of the process of change and continuity in human affairs (in order to make sense of their own place in time) and engagement in the process of historical enquiry – working directly with sources and seeing how the past is constructed. Such an approach was embedded in the GCSE examination specifications and assessments, which were introduced in 1986, and in various iterations of the National Curriculum for history in England since 1991.

How the subject is approached is clearly within the remit of the teacher to decide. As Mitchell and Lambert (2015) argued, teachers are 'curriculum makers', as they get to interpret and enact the curriculum, which students experience. Teachers therefore shape what parts of the curriculum students encounter, the depth in which different aspects are studied, the type of knowledge that is developed, all of which has an impact on how students see and understand the world in which they live. However, little is actually known about what teachers actually choose to teach and the extent to which they do adopt a disciplinary approach to history teaching, and it is this issue that is explored in the second set of data.

Schools and curriculum design

Data on what actually happens in the school curriculum is generally sparse. One important source that can provide some insight, is the annual survey that the HA has been conducting in England since 2010 to try to gauge the health of the subject. The survey is sent to all secondary school history departments in England (3,000 schools approximately), and the response rate varies from around 10–20 per cent per year (which seems to depend on whether significant changes are in the offing). The survey itself is completed online and typically contains between 50 and 60 items for response. For the purposes of this chapter, data are drawn from surveys conducted between 2010 and 2018, although most data reported here tends to come from the more recent surveys.

Questions seek background information on the schools (for example, school type, age range of pupils, size of school), descriptive data on curriculum arrangements (for example, length of key stages, amount of time allocated to the subject, options systems, GCSE and A-level take-up), and opinions about developments.[3] Most questions offer a series of closed responses, but participants do have the opportunity to provide qualitative comments to allow elaboration on the thinking behind particular decisions in schools. Some questions are asked year on year, allowing trends and patterns in some areas to be identified, while others are specific to particular years (which explains why some tables will present data from different years). A number of key findings related to how schools offer history in the curriculum are presented below.

Structural issues

Curriculum models

One way in which a school can either open up or restrict access to a subject is through the organisation of the curriculum. Under the New Labour government (in power between 1997 and 2010), schools were given the freedom to experiment with different ways of presenting the curriculum, which allowed integrated approaches such as the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce's (RSA) 'Opening Minds' curriculum, to appear. This particular curriculum was based on five competences: Citizenship; Learning; Managing information; Relating to people; Managing situations. This type of approach fits Future 2 model (Young and Muller, 2010), which is typified

by an emphasis on 'generic' skills and ways of thinking. The surveys show that such curriculum models were present in a small number of schools when the HA first began collecting data and that over time, following the formation of the UK Coalition government in 2010 and the more recent Conservative administrations, there has been a focus on what might be termed a more traditional curriculum model, with history having its own discrete identity. While the position of history thus appeared somewhat vulnerable in 2010, when only 76.5 per cent of survey respondents reported teaching it as a discrete subject within Key Stage 3,[4] it appeared much more secure in 2016 when 90.1 per cent of respondents reported teaching it in this way. In this sense it looks as if schools are now enabling students' access to a subject-based curriculum.

Time allocated to history

Within the curriculum, schools can still control the amount of time allocated to subjects. History is a compulsory part of the Key Stage 3 curriculum but schools can choose whether this phase is covered in two or three years. Reducing the Key Stage 3 curriculum to two years means that schools are able to spend an extra year on teaching examination courses.

Length of Key Stage 3

Since 2014, the survey data provides a clear indication that more schools are shortening the length of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. This was designed to allow schools to spend longer (that is, three years instead of two) in preparing students for high stakes national examinations (although more recently this has been discouraged by Ofsted, which is an independent inspection body for state-maintained schools). This trend was most notable in state-maintained comprehensive and academy schools, with nearly half of these recently reporting a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum model (see Table 5.1). It should be noted that in England there have been significant changes in the types of schools that students can attend. Comprehensive schools were the most common, catering for all students, were non-selective, and were funded and maintained by local authorities. In recent years many of these schools have chosen to, or been forced to, become academy schools. These receive funding directly from central government and are not maintained by local authorities. Academy schools have more freedoms than comprehensive schools, for example there is no obligation for them to follow the National Curriculum. Many academies now operate as groups (or federations)

Table 5.1 The length of Key Stage 3 as reported by schools 2014–18 (Source: Author, 2021)

Type of school	Year	Three-year Key Stage 3		Two-year Key Stage 3	
		Number	%	Number	%
Comprehensives, academies and free	**2018**	**110**	**56.1**	**86**	**43.9**
	2017	113	55.9	89	44.1
	2016	159	68.5	73	31.5
	2015	180	75.9	57	24.1
	2014	174	75.6	56	24.3
Grammar	**2018**	**4**	**40.0**	**6**	**60.0**
	2017	12	66.7	4	33.3
	2016	19	86.3	3	13.6
	2015	9	56.3	7	43.8
	2014	5	62.5	3	37.5
Independent	**2018**	**29**	**82.9**	**6**	**17.1**
	2017	35	85.4	6	14.6
	2016	40	93.0	3	7.0
	2015	49	89.1	6	10.9
	2014	34	89.5	4	10.5
All schools	**2018**	**152**	**59.8**	**102**	**40.2**
	2017	162	60.7	6	39.3
	2016	219	73.5	79	26.5
	2015	238	77.3	70	22.7
	2014	213	77.2	63	22.8

Note: Bold denotes the most recently reported values.

of schools or are part of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) run by a variety of organisations. Free schools are also relatively new and are effectively schools set up by local communities or groups. They are funded by the government but are free to run themselves as they wish. Independent schools, which are private schools and charge fees for students to attend, are also free to run themselves as they wish. Grammar schools exist in some parts of England (many were closed in the 1970s as comprehensive schools were widely introduced) and select students on academic 'ability'.

The concern here is that reducing the Key Stage 3 curriculum to two years effectively reduces the teaching time by a third for students,

especially as this is the first phase of education in which all students might be expected to have access to specialist history teaching, since primary teachers are generalists not subject specialists.

Curriculum time allocation

One way in which a school may mitigate the loss of a year's teaching by having a reduced Key Stage 3 is to increase the amount of time allocated to particular subjects and this does appear to be the case in many schools, as illustrated in Table 5.2. Although it seems that those schools which provide a two-year Key Stage 3 are more generous with the actual time allocation for history during those two years, it is still likely that the overall amount of time that a student will spend studying history will be less than if a school adopted a three-year Key Stage 3. For example, those with a two-year Key Stage 3 are more likely than those with a three-year Key Stage 3 to teach history for 90+ minutes a week. If we assume that schools with a two-year Key Stage 3 allocate 90 minutes a week to the subject and that there are 38 weeks in a school year, students would, in total, receive 6,840 minutes (114 hours) of teaching. This is exactly the same amount of teaching that a student following a three-year Key Stage 3 curriculum would receive if they were taught history for *only* 60 minutes a week. Since almost three-quarters of comprehensive and academy schools that offer a three-year Key Stage 3 report that they teach *more than* 60 minutes a week of history, it is clear that students attending a school with a two-year Key Stage 3 are likely to get less teaching time for history.

Another way to look at time allocation is to see whether schools are adjusting how much space within the curriculum is devoted to particular subject areas, that is whether they have decided to increase, decrease or maintain the time allocation. As can be seen in Table 5.3, data from earlier surveys show that although most schools chose not to change the time allocation, around a fifth of schools reduced the time allocated to history. Although this trend looks to have declined across the period of the survey, the more recent data suggests a renewed move towards cutting time for history (possibly in response to a renewed emphasis on English and maths results in school accountability measures).[5] It could be argued that overall the situation regarding time allocation is largely stable, but there are significant numbers of history departments experiencing a reduction in time allocation and it is not clear whether this has ever been reversed, as the schools reporting an increase in time allocation tend to be few each year.

Table 5.2 Reported actual time allocation for teaching history 2015–18 for Year 7 (students aged 11–12) (Source: Author, 2021)

		Three-year Key Stage 3											
Type of school	**Year**	**1–30 mins**		**31–45 mins**		**46–60 mins**		**61–75 mins**		**76–90 mins**		**90+ mins**	
		No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
Comprehensives and academies	**2018**	**0**	**0.0**	**0**	**0.0**	**21**	**19.8**	**21**	**19.8**	**38**	**35.8**	**26**	**24.5**
	2017	0	0.0	3	2.8	21	19.3	16	14.7	41	37.6	28	25.7
	2016	1	0.7	4	2.6	34	22.1	19	12.3	45	29.2	51	33.1
	2015	0	0.0	2	1.2	50	29.8	17	10.1	49	23.2	50	29.8
Grammar	**2018**	**1**	**20.0**	**0**	**0.0**	**0**	**0.0**	**0**	**0.0**	**3**	**60.0**	**1**	**20.0**
	2017	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	33.3	1	8.3	4	33.3	3	25.0
	2016	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	20.0	5	25.0	3	15.0	8	40.0
	2015	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	50.0	0	0.0	2	50.0	0	0.0
Independent	**2018**	**0**	**0.0**	**0**	**0.0**	**7**	**25.9**	**5**	**18.5**	**9**	**33.3**	**6**	**22.2**
	2017	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	30.3	8	24.2	10	30.3	5	15.2
	2016	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	31.0	11	26.2	10	23.8	8	19.0
	2015	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	27.3	12	36.4	8	24.2	4	12.1
All schools	**2018**	**1**	**0.7**	**0**	**0.0**	**28**	**20.3**	**26**	**18.8**	**50**	**36.2**	**33**	**23.9**
	2017	0	0.0	3	1.9	35	22.4	26	16.7	56	35.9	36	23.1
	2016	1	0.5	4	1.9	51	23.6	35	16.2	58	26.9	67	31.0
	2015	0	0.0	2	1.0	61	29.8	29	14.1	59	28.8	54	26.3

Two-year Key Stage 3												
Comprehensives and academies	**2018**	**1**	**1.2**	**1**	**1.2**	**17**	**20.0**	**10**	**11.8**	**15**	**17.6**	**41**	**48.2**
	2017	1	1.3	0	0.0	14	17.7	14	17.7	18	22.8	32	40.5
	2016	0	0.0	1	1.4	13	18.8	9	13.0	11	15.9	35	50.7
	2015	1	1.9	1	1.9	15	28.8	2	3.8	15	28.8	19	36.5
Grammar	**2018**	**0**	**0.0**	**1**	**16.7**	**0**	**0.0**	**1**	**16.7**	**2**	**33.3**	**2**	**33.3**
	2017	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	1	16.7
	2016	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	50.0	2	50.0
	2015	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	100.0
Independent	**2018**	**0**	**0.0**	**0**	**0.0**	**1**	**25.0**	**1**	**25.0**	**1**	**25.0**	**1**	**25.0**
	2017	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	3	75	0	0.0
	2016	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	1	50.0
	2015	1	33.3	0	0.0	1	33.3	0	0.0	1	33.3	0	0.0
All schools	**2018**	**1**	**1.1**	**2**	**2.1**	**18**	**18.9**	**12**	**12.6**	**18**	**18.9**	**44**	**46.3**
	2017	1	1.1	1	1.1	18	19.6	16	17.4	23	25.0	33	35.9
	2016	0	0.0	1	1.3	13	17.3	9	12.0	14	18.7	38	50.7
	2015	2	3.4	1	1.7	16	27.1	2	3.4	16	27.1	22	37.3

Note: Bold denotes the most recently reported values.

Table 5.3 Number of schools reporting changes to curriculum time allocation for history (Source: Author, 2021)

Year of survey	Curriculum time allocation			Total
	Decreased	Remained the same	Increased	
2018	36	182	25	243
2017	44	177	25	246
2016	35	154	28	217
2015	8	65	8	81
2014	13	180	14	207
2013	43	277	34	354
2012	13	197	12	222
2011	68	265	20	353
2010	119	359	25	503

Who teaches it?

Another potential means of hindering access to a disciplinary approach to history teaching is by allocating the teaching to non-specialists, who may lack the disciplinary understanding of the subject. Obviously, such a comparison assumes that those trained to teach history do employ a disciplinary approach. This may not always be the case, but open-ended responses in the survey relating to the 2013 history curriculum proposals did indicate that the vast majority of respondents rejected what was perceived as a 'traditional' content-heavy curriculum model (Harris and Burn, 2016).

The survey data indicates that, in many schools, non-specialists are deployed to teach history, particularly in the Key Stage 3 years. It would seem that the pressure to do well at GCSE means that schools concentrate their strongest, specialist teachers in the examination classes. As seen in Figure 5.1 there is a great deal of similarity in the pattern of non-specialist teaching across the years 2015–18. But it is clear that comprehensive and academy schools are more likely to use non-specialist teachers in Key Stage 3.

This is a concern, as it is probable that these non-specialists, who have neither a degree background in history, nor experience of a history-specific training programme, are less likely to appreciate the disciplinary nature of the subject; as Wineburg (2001) showed, there are distinct differences between the 'common sense' approach that most people

adopt to make sense of the past and the 'unnatural' form of thinking that history actually requires.

Options systems

At the end of Key Stage 3 students can stop studying history altogether, as it becomes an optional examination subject. However, the methods that the government uses to measure school examination success (which includes particular consideration of a selected range of English

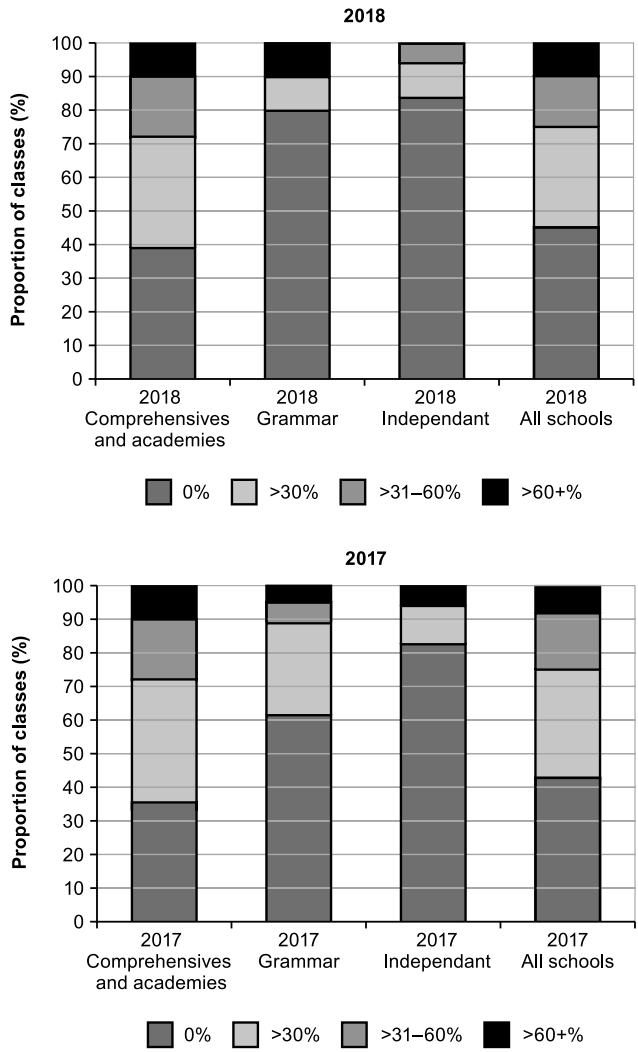

Figure 5.1 *(Continues on next page)*

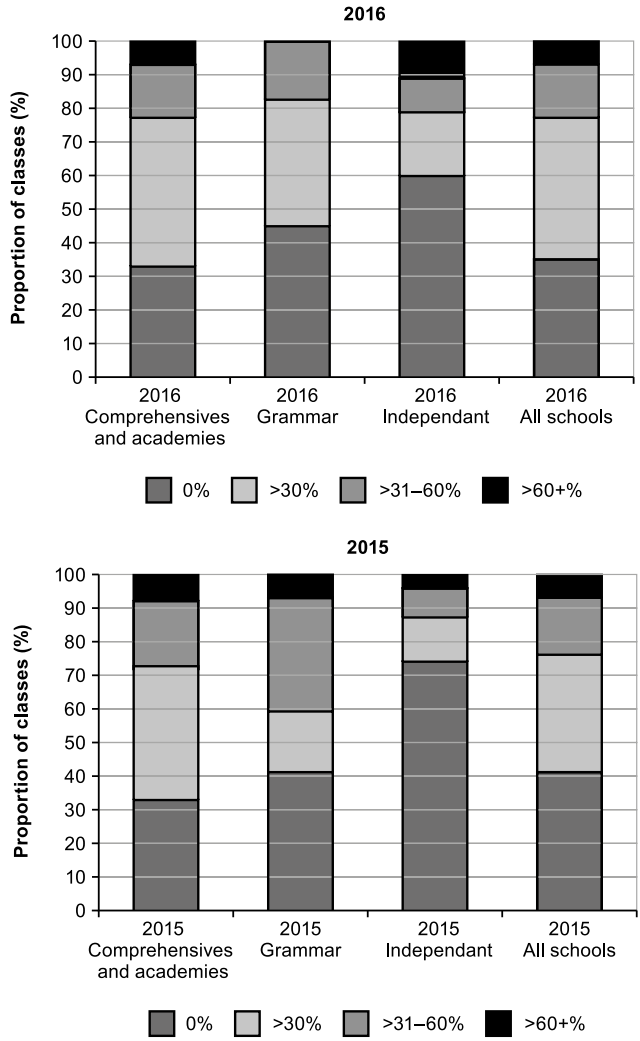

Figure 5.1 The proportion of Year 7 classes taught by non-specialist history teachers (Source: Historical Association, 2019)

Baccalaureate or 'EBacc subjects')[6] means there is pressure on schools to ensure that students study either history and/or geography. Over the past four years many schools seem to be moving away from complete free choice of subjects and increasing the degree of compulsion (see Table 5.4). Overall, around 40 per cent of students opt for history. At one level this looks like positive news, as it represents an increase from around 30 per cent in the final years of the New Labour government,

Table 5.4 The extent to which students have freedom of choice at GCSE (Source: Historical Association, 2019)

Year	A requirement that *all* students must take						A requirement that *some* students must take						A completely free choice about history		Total*
	History		History *or* geography		History *and/or* geography		History		History *or* geography		History *and/or* geography				
2018	5	2.0%	5	2.0%	92	37.1%	5	2.0%	2	1.2%	32	12.5%	107	42.7%	248
2017	5	1.9%	26	10.0%	85	32.6%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%	33	12.6%	111	42.5%	261
2016	3	1.0%	16	5.6%	84	29.2%	3	1.0%	5	1.7%	34	11.8%	141	49.0%	288
2015	8	2.1%	10	2.7%	83	22.3%	3	0.8%	5	1.3%	50	13.4%	214	57.4%	373
2014	0	0.0%	7	2.6%	44	16.5%	7	2.6%	8	3.0%	46	17.3%	154	57.9%	266

Notes: There are two columns per category, the first column denotes the number of schools and the second column the percentage of schools.
* Total number of schools who took part in the survey.

Table 5.5 Combined 2010–14 data (in percentage) showing history take-up by type of school (based on Harris et al., 2020: 235)

Pupils studying history GCSE in Year 10	Type of school				
	Comprehensive	Grammar	Pre-2010 academy	Post-2010 academy	Independent
0–15	8.36	1.45	8.96	2.81	1.74
16–30	20.43	8.70	22.39	9.38	6.40
31–45	33.70	18.84	29.85	33.13	19.19
46–60	26.18	34.78	20.90	36.25	25.58
61–100	11.33	36.23	17.91	18.44	47.09

and thus means that more students are accessing a history education beyond Key Stage 3. However, these figures alone obscure concerns about *which* students have this opportunity.

The type of schools that students attend has an impact on their access to history at GCSE. Independent and grammar schools persistently enter higher numbers for history GCSE (see Table 5.5). Although there are many comprehensive and academy schools with a high proportion of students taking history at GCSE, these are usually in more affluent areas. There is a statistically significant correlation between the IDACI[7] score for an area in which a school is located and the proportion of students entered for GCSE history (see Figure 5.2). This suggests that schools may potentially be making decisions about which students do and do not have access to an extensive history education based upon their socio-economic status and their perceived likelihood of obtaining a good examination result. Figure 5.2 displays the mean IDACI score

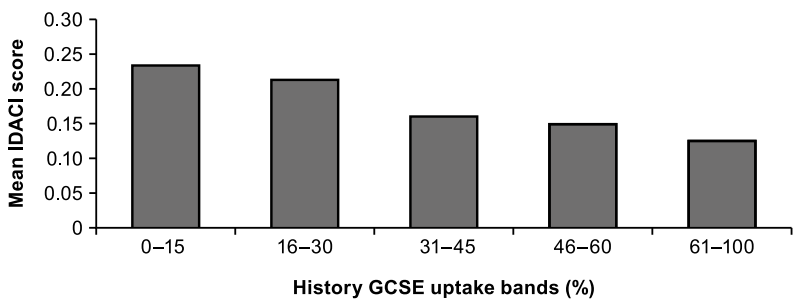

Figure 5.2 Correlation between GCSE uptake and IDACI score (Source: Author, 2021)

for each uptake band, for survey responses from 2010 to 2014. It is clear there is a significant negative correlation between IDACI score and uptake (r = -0.221, p = <0.001). For example, schools with 0–15 per cent history GCSE uptake have a mean IDACI score of 0.24 (meaning 24 per cent of their students come from low-income families) compared with a mean IDACI score of 0.13 for schools with the highest uptake of 60–100 per cent.

Who is encouraged to do GCSE?

Further analysis of the data shows that students with low prior attainment are much less likely to have access to GCSE history (see Table 5.6).[8] For example, the Department for Education (DfE) performance table data for 2014 shows that only 103 schools entered more than a quarter of their pupils with low prior attainment into the EBacc subjects (which would include history), whereas for pupils with middle prior attainment and high prior attainment, the figures are 1,904 and 2,943 schools, respectively (DfE, n.d.). The figures in Table 5.6 show that the introduction of the EBacc has seen a sizable growth in the numbers of students with middle and high prior attainment entered for this suite of subjects, while those with low prior attainment are unlikely to study the full range of EBacc subjects. Clearly these figures relate to a range of subjects and so it is theoretically possible that large numbers of lower attaining students

Table 5.6 Percentage of students being entered for EBacc subjects by prior attainment (Source: Author, 2021)

Year	Prior attainment	Percentage of schools that enter more than	
		25% for the EBacc	50% for the EBacc
2014	Low	3.1	0.6
	Middle	60.1	19.0
	High	93.4	76.6
2013	Low	4.3	0.7
	Middle	52.0	16.1
	High	89.5	69.4
2012	Low	0.8	0.1
	Middle	23.2	6.5
	High	68.1	34.4

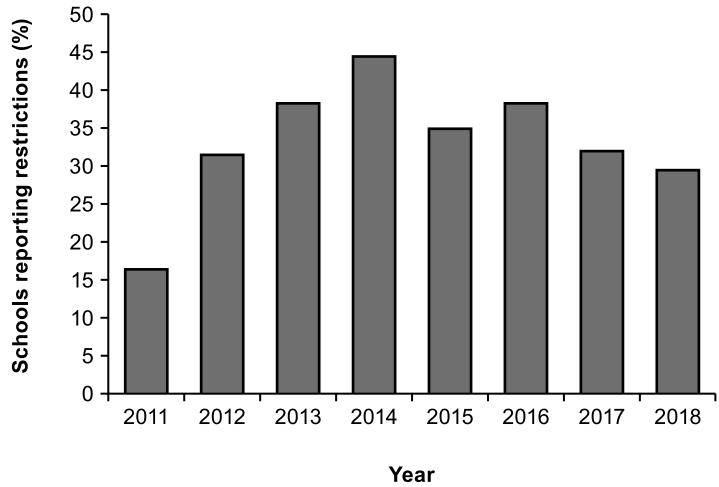

Figure 5.3 Schools reporting restrictions on students able to study history at GCSE (Source: Author, 2021)

are actually entered for history, but not for the full range of subjects required for recognition in the EBacc. The likelihood of that being the case is challenged by other data from the HA surveys which suggests that, in recent years, around a third of schools have been restricting student access to history, based largely on students' expected levels of attainment or perceived academic weaknesses (see Figure 5.3). While the statistical data alone does not reveal whether schools are making such decisions based on what is deemed 'good' for the student or for the school (in terms of its overall accountability measures, such as examination success), the qualitative responses make it clear that some history teachers clearly regret the restrictions.

It appears that there are structural issues that restrict access to history in a significant number of schools. Both the type of school a student attends and the socio-economic status of an area have a significant impact on access to a history education. Beyond that, other decisions and actions taken by schools further restrict access to the subject. These include the time allocated to the subject within the curriculum (in terms of length of Key Stage 3, actual time allocation and whether the overall time allocation has been reduced), whether specialist staff are able to teach the subject, and restrictions imposed by schools on whether students are able to study history at GCSE. Although the majority of students do have access to study history, the data suggest increasingly there are obstacles that, either directly or indirectly, serve to restrict who

can study history, and that students from poorer areas and with low prior attainment or a range of educational needs are more likely to be denied access to the subject.

Teachers and the history curriculum

The findings relating to what history teachers actually choose to teach are based on schemes of work and interviews with the teachers who taught them.[9] The study was conducted in 2015–16 and involved 10 schools from the south of England. The schemes varied in level of detail, but generally included the substantive content to be taught and the aims of particular lessons, while many also provided suggested activities and resources. These gave a good indication as to the nature of what was intended. The schemes of work were analysed primarily to identify whether they reflected a disciplinary approach to teaching history. Where there was a clear focus (in the question/topic heading in the scheme of work and/or learning objectives) on second-order concepts such as causation and/or procedural ideas, such as the use of sources as evidence, this was interpreted as a disciplinary approach (although, as will be explained later, there was a distinct difference in the ways in which schools focused on these two aspects of disciplinary thinking). Other examples where the focus was on the content to be taught, either substantive knowledge or substantive concepts (for example, empire), were seen as non-disciplinary and lacking powerful knowledge. However, an examination of the content selected by teachers also raised questions about what content might be considered 'valuable' or 'meaningful' to students.

The emphasis on disciplinary knowledge

Earlier studies (for example, Harris and Haydn, 2006) show that many pupils enjoy their history lessons and that teachers are central to students' level of engagement with the subject. But there are fewer studies that look at how teachers conceptualise the nature of history and what students actually study and the type of knowledge that is promoted. As noted earlier, there seems to be an assumption that disciplinary approaches to history teaching in England are the norm; however, as McCrum (2013) has shown, not all history teachers' approaches align with a disciplinary understanding of the subject.

There were differences in how much of a disciplinary focus was evident in the schemes of work. This can be seen in Table 5.7 which shows the ways in which Apple School and Lemon School approached teaching the topic of medieval Britain. Lemon School's scheme of work identifies topics and key features and events, with few clear references to second-order concepts of processes of knowledge or processes of knowledge construction. In this instance, the focus appears to be on developing students' substantive knowledge of the past as the main priority. This was also reflected in Gemma's (Lemon School) interview where she spoke more about what substantive content she wanted students to learn. In contrast, Alison (Apple School) felt that developing students' ability to 'handle evidence' and 'managing different points of view' were vitally important. This emphasis can also be seen in the way in which enquiry questions and objectives are phrased to include second-order concepts and processes in Apple School's scheme of work, which indicates a clearer disciplinary approach to teaching history. Although there were indications that Gemma was aware of disciplinary aspects of history education, her approach could be construed as 'discipline-lite', compared with a more discipline-'heavy' approach from Alison.

Overall, analysis of the schemes of work indicates that five of the schools had a clear disciplinary approach to the teaching of history, with lessons focused on second-order concepts or processes (as shown through the phrasing of enquiry questions, learning objectives and/or examples of activities). Three schools appeared to have a stronger focus on developing students' substantive knowledge, as their schemes of work mainly identified historical topics and key events or features. Two of the other schools seemed to have a more mixed approach. In one of these cases, Orange School, the department taught large-scale thematic sweeps through time (that is, political change in the UK through time, followed by religious changes and so forth). This was designed to provide the students with a clear understanding of the second-order concept of change and continuity, but there was also a strong emphasis on developing the students' substantive knowledge of those changes.

However, what emerged as an interesting distinction among those teachers with a disciplinary approach was the degree of emphasis that was evident regarding second-order concepts and processes. Second-order concepts, such as cause and consequence, and change and continuity, essentially require students to analyse and explain events and phenomena, which means that students need to work with a body of knowledge and use that to construct an explanatory historical account (for example, Kitson *et al.*, 2011). Working with sources and examining

Table 5.7 Comparison of two schools' approaches to medieval English history (Source: Harris and Reynolds, 2018: 146)

Apple School			Lemon School		
Enquiry question/topic focus	**Concept/process**	**Key features**	**Enquiry question/topic focus**	**Concept/process**	**Key features**
Who should be king in 1066?		Knowledge of individuals	Contenders to the throne		Knowledge of individuals
The Riccall mystery: Whose head is it?	Source work		Battle of Stamford Bridge		Key events
What happened at the Battle of Hastings?		Key events	Battle of Hastings		Key events
Why did William win the Battle of Hastings?	Causation and evidence		Why did William win the Battle of Hastings?	Causation	
Why did it matter that William won the Battle of Hastings?	Consequences, change and continuity	Key features	The Bayeux Tapestry		Knowledge
How did Becket die?	Source work		Change and continuity in Norman England	Change and continuity	
Who was to blame for the death of Becket?	Causation		How did William control England?		Key features
Did King John deserve the Magna Carta?	Source work	Key events	The Domesday Book		Knowledge

(Continued Table 5.7)

(Continued Table 5.7)

Apple School			Lemon School		
Enquiry question/topic focus	**Concept/process**	**Key features**	**Enquiry question/topic focus**	**Concept/process**	**Key features**
Why did people go on crusade?	Causation		Was Richard I that great? Was Saladin greater?		Knowledge of individuals
Why was the Black Death so terrifying in 1348?	Source work		Islamic medicine		Key features
What were the Wars of the Roses and why did they happen?	Causation	Key events	Magna Carta		Key events
Why were medieval people obedient to the Church?	Causation	Key features	Medieval towns		Key features
			Medieval villages		Key features
			Causes of the Black Death	Causation	
			Cures for the Black Death		Key features
			Consequences of the Black Death		Key features
			Witchcraft and medicine		Key features
			The Peasants' Revolt		Key events

historical interpretations, however, tends to create a stronger focus on how knowledge of the past is constructed. While 'second-order' concepts tend to be concerned with the kinds of questions that historians ask about the past, procedural concepts are associated particularly with the use of sources as evidence and the processes by which our knowledge of the past is constructed; yet both are essential elements in understanding history as a discipline. It is therefore interesting to note how schools emphasise these aspects quite differently. For example, in Plum School's unit of work on Anglo-Saxons (see Table 5.8), there is a strong emphasis on using sources to understand how knowledge of the past is constructed.

Table 5.8 Comparison of different disciplinary emphases in Plum School (Source: Author, 2021)

Enquiry question/topic focus	Concept/ process	Key features
Unit of work on Anglo-Saxon Britain		
The big story of movement and settlement	Chronology, change and continuity, causation	
How can Sutton Hoo help us learn about the Saxons?	Source work	
How can we use artefacts to investigate Saxon Southampton?	Source work	
Should St Mary's stadium have been built?	Source work	
How did England change 500 BC–410 AD?	Change and continuity	
Unit of work on medieval Britain		
Who should be king in 1066?		Knowledge of individuals
How did events unravel in 1066?		Key events
Why did men risk their lives in 1066?	Causation	
How did the Battle of Hastings happen?	Causation	Key events
Why did a Frenchman become king of England?	Causation	

(Continued Table 5.8)

(Continued Table 5.8)

Enquiry question/topic focus	Concept/ process	Key features
How did Harold die?	Source work	
Who told the truth about Hastings?	Source work	
How significant was Hastings?	Significance	
Why is the king being whipped?	Causation	
How do historians investigate murder?	Source work	
What was a medieval king supposed to do?		Features of monarchy
Why were the barons angry at John?	Causation	
How have interpretations of John changed over time?	Interpretations	
How has the power of the monarchy changed from 1066 to 1649?	Change and continuity	
How can we find out what medieval villages really looked like?	Source work	
How can we show change and continuity in the Middle Ages?	Change and continuity	
How different was life in Baghdad?	Similarity and difference	

Questions such as 'How can we use artefacts to investigate Saxon Southampton?' have a clear evidential focus, designed to get students thinking about how we know what we do. However, this emphasis on understanding how knowledge of the past is constructed is atypical. Plum School's unit on medieval Britain (see Table 5.8) has a heavier emphasis on second-order concepts such as causation. This type of approach was far more common across the schools which were identified as having a strong disciplinary approach to teaching history.

Overall, analysis of the enquiry questions and learning objectives and associated tasks reveals a strong bias towards causation, and a lesser emphasis on change and continuity. Enquiries about historical interpretation, which has been valued for showing the fluid nature of historical knowledge as new claims are advanced and previous arguments challenged, and which would therefore be a key element in any understanding of the powerful knowledge (Young, 2013) inherent

in a disciplinary approach to history teaching, featured infrequently in the schemes of work.

It was possible to identify distinct second-order and procedural foci in the Year 7 schemes of work on medieval Britain across seven of the schools. In total there were 57 lessons with a focus on causation, 21 focusing on change and continuity, 6 on similarity and difference, 43 on source work (although these were concentrated in 4 departments), 10 on historical interpretations, 18 on historical significance (although 11 of these lessons were in 1 department), and 69 on developing substantive concepts/knowledge. It might be argued that less emphasis on the more procedural forms of thinking could reflect the age of the students and their intellectual maturity. To check this hypothesis, a similar analysis was conducted on the schemes of work that covered the twentieth-century world (which is typically the last unit taught in Key Stage 3, but might be taught to Year 8 or Year 9 depending on whether the school has a two- or three-year Key Stage 3). In this instance it was possible to work with schemes of work from five schools and this time there were 53 lessons that had an emphasis on cause and consequence, 17 on change and continuity, 8 on similarity and difference, 26 on working with sources (although almost half were in 1 department), 5 on interpretations, 4 on significance and 38 on developing substantive concepts/knowledge. Calculating the ratio of lessons focused on second-order concepts, historical processes and substantive knowledge indicates a degree of similarity between the lessons in the medieval Britain schemes of work and the twentieth century.

The emphasis on 'valuable' or 'meaningful' knowledge

An additional issue that emerged from analysis of these schemes of work, beyond consideration of the ways in which they engaged with disciplinary knowledge, was the extent to which content was deliberately selected because of its inherent 'value' to young people. In most cases the choice of content was largely based on teachers' familiarity with the topics and the availability of resources, however, two schemes of work stood out. Tanya's curriculum at Plum School had an even-handed approach to teaching history as a discipline, with a balance of lessons focused on second-order concepts and how history is constructed. In terms of content, Tanya's selection included a number of thematic issues, which were revisited. Movement and settlement of peoples appeared, for example, at several points in the schemes of work. There was also a

strong element of local history, which meant themes were explored from local, national and occasionally international perspectives. There was a mix of depth and overview in the way that different topics were taught. Tanya's curriculum was clearly based on a disciplinary understanding of the past (both concepts and processes), while the content was selected to explore history on different scales (both geographically and temporally), and to make the content more meaningful and valuable to students through revisiting themes (which were seen as relevant issues, such as migration) and local history.

Jane at Orange School felt that students need to have a coherent overview of the past, which would act as a framework, providing a context into which new knowledge could be added, to make sense of the world today. For example, she explained that students aged 11–12 studied religious changes, such as the Reformation, 'not because necessarily they can connect with that, but just because they just don't understand religion and I think that's concerning in a world which is still dominated by religion'.

There was also an element of ensuring students had particular 'cultural capital', so she felt that students had to have an overview of the past in order to understand key turning points in British history. This led her to structuring her scheme of work around large thematic overviews taught each half term. Thus, students would gain a political overview of British history from medieval to modern times, followed by an economic overview and so forth. This would also allow students to see how various changes intersected, for example during periods of major religious change there was a corresponding degree of technological change. The disciplinary thinking behind this planning was conceptual, in that it was intended to develop a strong sense of change and continuity, with a view to being able to provide an explanation of how the world changed, rather than emphasising history as a process. Although Jane's scheme of work had a particularly narrow disciplinary focus, the emphasis on providing a thematic overview of the past did give a clear sense of the power that clear structural frameworks can provide in building knowledge of the past, allowing students to fit new ideas and information together with what they have already learned. It allowed students to make associations and connections between different aspects of the past, and it seemed to offer coherence to the curriculum in relation to content selection. In these two cases there was a deliberate attempt to teach both substantive content and conceptual knowledge because they worked together to build a historical frame of reference, but the impetus in each case originated from a different disciplinary approach

to history: Tanya's fully encompassed history as a discipline while Jane really wanted to establish a sense of change and continuity through time.

Overall, what emerges from this analysis is a strong sense that a disciplinary approach to teaching history cannot be assumed. About half of the schools involved in this part of the study did adopt a disciplinary approach to the subject, but this was skewed towards an emphasis on second-order concepts, rather than on examining how the past is constructed and therefore open to dispute. In addition, the analysis raises questions about the selection of content and the value of building a frame of reference constructed around significant themes, with acknowledgement of the different geographical and temporal scales across which the subject can be understood.

Discussion

Generally, there seem to be three issues that emerge from the data presented here. One relates to how schools act as gatekeeper to the curriculum and therefore control the exposure that students have to subjects such as history. The second relates to the type of knowledge to which students gain access when they are taught and whether this is of a disciplinary nature. The third issue is to do with the selection of substantive knowledge and what role this plays in providing students with 'valuable' knowledge, alongside the 'powerful' knowledge of the discipline.

Access to the history curriculum

The findings from these two studies show that students are not necessarily able to access the powerful knowledge or disciplinary approach to history teaching. Schools make a number of decisions that serve to constrain access to the history curriculum: decisions related to the amount of curriculum time given to the subject, who gets to study history at examination level, and who teaches the subject. Clearly there will be constraints on any decisions that schools make about their curriculum, so it is not simply a case, for example, of arguing for more time (although this would be helpful!) as such issues are not easily resolved. Being aware of these issues and arguing that students should be entitled to a history education may help. But perhaps the bigger concern is that there is not an equitable access to a history education across the country. Indeed, there is a large disparity, dictated mainly by the type of

school a student attends and the socio-economic status of an area. The data do not explain why this is the case, but they do reveal a clear association. Any attempt here to explain the connection can only be a matter of conjecture, but it may be to do with the perceived nature of the subject, its level of conceptual challenge, the literacy demands inherent within it, or with the perceived (lack of) value associated with the subject.

One of the questions which arises from such reflections is why there is an inequitable access to history in the curriculum in the first place. In part this stems from the fact that history is not a core subject and is not compulsory to the age of 16. But this is a common situation for many subjects. We need to look beyond the requirement to choose and examine what is understood or assumed (by education policymakers, teachers, young people and their parents) about the value of knowing and understanding the past. If history were commonly perceived as valuable and relevant in people's everyday lives, then the case for providing more equitable access to the subject would be more powerful and compelling.

Disciplinary history in schools

At the moment, much of the debate about the value of history focuses on the need for a disciplinary approach to the subject, as this allows people to see that the past is a construct, and therefore is provisional and open to change (and potential abuse) (for example, Seixas, 2007; Lee, 2011). Knowing how claims to knowledge are constructed allows young people to evaluate claims made within and beyond the classroom. As Wineburg (2001) has argued, thinking historically is not natural and requires a disciplinary mindset to be nurtured. In this sense history would be seen as a form of powerful knowledge as defined by Muller and Young (2019).

However, the data from the departmental schemes of work show that, although most of the teachers in the study tend to adopt a disciplinary approach to the subject, this is mainly focused on a conceptual rather than a procedural approach. This appears to be an important distinction and presents what could be termed a 'discipline-lite' approach as opposed to a truly disciplinary approach to the subject. A 'disciplinary-lite' approach includes an emphasis on second-order concepts, exploring patterns of change, advancing causal explanations, debating the extent of similarity and difference and making claims about the historical significance of particular events. Although these are all essential to the discipline, tackling such activities without an

understanding of the processes by which the substantive knowledge used to reach such judgements has been produced represents an inadequate understanding of the discipline. Students need to be made be aware of the process or procedures which underpin any historical explanation, and which lead to competing interpretations of the past; an emphasis on how claims about the past are made and how their validity can be evaluated offers a stronger disciplinary approach. This aspect is what makes learning history truly powerful. Students need to understand that the past is a construct, and so should appreciate the process by which our understanding of the past is put together. In itself, this distinction between a 'discipline-lite' and a secure disciplinary approach to teaching history raises important questions about what history teachers do. An undue focus on developing second-order concepts while neglecting questions about the status of the knowledge that underpins the explanations or arguments advanced may be hindering students' understanding of history as a discipline and thereby restricting students' access to powerful knowledge.

Beyond powerful knowledge – the place of 'valuable' knowledge

However, the findings from this study also suggest that the debate might need to go further and consider what makes knowledge, not just 'powerful', but 'valuable' and 'meaningful'. Moore (2013: 348), an advocate of the social realist school of thought about the importance of powerful knowledge in the curriculum, argued that 'the Realist principles … do not specify the *content* of a curriculum, but rather the *kind* of knowledge it should include'. Yet as Yates and Miller (2016: 309) argued, 'content selection is a distinctive *curriculum* issue, not simply one that can be derived authoritatively from the disciplines themselves.' This raises a particular issue in history education, which is reflected in the approaches devised by Tanya and Jane. Tanya's approach is clearly underpinned by disciplinary thinking, while Jane's is discipline-lite, yet they both offer students carefully considered substantive content designed to provide students with something that could be considered meaningful and valuable. In contrast most of the other teachers in the study seem to have based their choice of curriculum content on logistical and practical reasons. Clearly, students need to learn substantive content, but departments that lack a clear rationale for the choice of that content, based on its value to young people, leaves history teaching open to the accusation either that the subject is comprised of a random selection of substantive knowledge, designated as 'core'; or – if no such 'core' has been

identified – that substantive knowledge does not actually matter (in that it is subservient to a set of generic 'skills'). The former position has been critiqued for representing merely 'knowledge of the powerful' (Young, 2013) and potentially presenting an uncritical story of the past. The latter has been attacked for developing generic information processing skills that lack any disciplinary power (Young and Muller, 2010). It would seem, therefore, that there ought to be further consideration of what content should specifically be taught and how to approach this demanding task, because substantive content matters.

Counsell (2017) made the point that substantive historical knowledge is not hierarchical, as it is in other subject areas where certain elements need to be mastered before others can be tackled; instead substantive historical knowledge is cumulative. As such, substantive knowledge becomes more useful and valuable the more you know, as associations and connections can be made to provide new or developing insights, and would, in turn, better support some elements of students' conceptual thinking. An understanding of certain second-order concepts, such as causation, would, for example, be aided by students being able to draw upon detailed knowledge relevant to an event, as well as prior knowledge that allows them to contrast and compare different contexts. However, this should not be a random assemblage of facts. And perhaps herein lays the next challenge. Content could be structured around developing students' knowledge and understanding of substantive concepts, such as empire, which could be enhanced through a series of planned encounters, drawing on different temporal and geographical contexts (Fordham, 2016). Or content selection could focus on the value of developing particular historical frameworks of knowledge, based around key themes (for example, Howson and Shemilt, 2017).

To an extent this debate reflects the differing approaches of Tanya and Jane. Tanya appears to have constructed a curriculum based around disciplinary values and carefully selected content which takes into account themes as well as differing scales of history (local, national and global). Jane has carefully considered her content selection, which is securely structured around themes, but which emphasises a 'discipline-lite' approach. Although both offer students valuable substantive knowledge, Jane's lack of emphasis on the process of history means students are unlikely to see history as a construct where competing versions of the past may exist, and these students may lack the ability to arbitrate between these rival versions. The danger is that students not exposed to the full disciplinary nature of history may see the past as a single story if presented with a single narrative, or may recognise that

there are alternative versions of the past, but conclude that it does not matter which, if any, are valid, because they lack the wherewithal to subject these to disciplinary scrutiny. This issue is important, because, as Taylor and Guyver (2012) and Nakou and Barca (2010) showed, governments around the world frequently look to use school history to foster a sense of national identity and/or social cohesion, through the imposition of a particular historical narrative. In such situations it is perfectly possible for history to be abused to promote views of the past, which are at best simplistic, and at worst deliberately distorting: for example, using perceived past injustices as a rationale for persecution of specific groups. An emphasis on understanding history as a discipline has the potential to offer a fuller understanding of the past and therefore how we understand and act in the present.

To sum up, there seem to be a number of issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that young people are given the benefit of powerful knowledge that can be gained from a study of history. At a fundamental level there needs to be debate about access to the history curriculum. If history is seen as crucial to a young person's understanding of the world in which they live and the way in which claims about the past are made and used (or abused), then students need equitable access to this curriculum. Their chances of obtaining such an education should not depend on the type of school they attend, where they live or who they are. Yet the data suggest this is what currently happens.

However, having granted them access to this history curriculum, attention should focus on the nature and value of the knowledge young people receive. As the analysis of the schemes of work reveals, many history departments offer a disciplinary-lite approach to the study of history, more focused on the second-order concepts (such as causation and change and continuity), rather than the processes and procedures of history that potentially offer stronger powerful knowledge. At the same time history teachers should give greater consideration to the selection of substantive historical content that ensures that this powerful knowledge is seen as valuable.

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Notes

1 These surveys have been published on the HA website and can be found at Historical Association (2020). The surveys have also been used in the writing of other published articles: Harris and Burn (2011) and Harris *et al*. (2020).
2 This data has been used in writing another article: Harris and Reynolds (2018).
3 General Certificate of Secondary Education (or GCSEs) are national examinations usually taken at age 16. Students study a number of subjects (some of which are compulsory). Advanced level (or A levels) are national examinations normally taken at age 18. Students tend to study a small number, typically three. There are no compulsory subjects at this level.
4 Key Stage 3 (sometimes abbreviated to KS3) is the first phase of secondary school education that usually spans Years 7–9 (that is, students aged 11–14).
5 The way the government reports school examination outcomes means that English and mathematics are given extra emphasis. One measure is to report the percentage of students obtaining five or more good examination results *including* English and mathematics (when GCSEs were graded from A* to G, a C was considered a 'good' result). The government has also introduced new measures, known as Progress 8 and Attainment 8, which reports students' progress and actual attainment across eight subject areas – in this measure English and mathematics are given double weighting in calculating a schools' results.
6 The English Baccalaureate, introduced by the government in 2010, is a combination of subjects that includes English, maths, a science, a foreign language, and history or geography. It is not a formal award, but various performance measures published annually report on schools' entries and outcomes in relation to the EBacc range of subjects.
7 IDACI stands for Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index and is an indication of the level of poverty in an area defined by postcode. It provides an overall deprivation score and ranks areas by level of deprivation.
8 An explanation of how the government calculates prior attainment can be found at Department for Education (DfE, 2020).
9 Schemes of work are typically medium-term plans, which many departments in English schools use, to provide an outline of material to be covered, suggested ideas as to how to teach topics and key assessment points. There is no national guidance on the nature and content of schemes of work, so these can vary considerably from school to school in their level of detail.

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